

JOSEPH STACY MURDOCK
My Grandfather
A Utah Pioneer of 1847

Joseph Stacy Murdock was born in Hamilton, Madison County, New York June 26, 1822. He was the son of Joseph Murdock born November 14, 1783 at Lebanon, Windham County, Conn., and Sally Stacy born April 3, 1788 at New Salem, Mass.

The Murdock family were early settlers of Hamilton which is 29 miles southwest of Utica. It was named in honor of Alexander Hamilton and was a charming village of about 1800 people in the spacious, fertile valley of the Chenango River. This valley was the home of the Oneida Indians, a friendly peaceful, basketmaking tribe who were neutral in the Revolutionary War and loyal to the colonists. The main street of Hamilton was laid off from a well worn Oneida Indian trail. Indian boys were Joseph's friends.

In the year 1830 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was organized in Fayette, Seneca County, New York. This was a nearby county to Hamilton and by 1836 the missionaries had converted and baptized the family of Joseph Murdock. By 1840 they had sold their property and started for Kirtland, Ohio by wagon.

By this time Joseph Stacy was about 20 years of age and before leaving their old home decided to marry Miss Eunice Sweet a noble young lady of the same faith which he did and they helped his parents and younger brothers in the move to Kirtland and about one year later to Nauvoo. Here they established a new home in the year 1842.

They became well acquainted with the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum Smith, and listened often to their teachings and the Saints were kind to Father Murdock as he was ill a great deal. Joseph Stacy was a bodyguard of the Prophet and often joined with him in sports such as jumping and wrestling and learned to love and respect him. They loved Nauvoo and the people. They bought one and one-fourth acres of land about one-half mile east of the Temple, also twenty-five acres of prairie land for farming and ten acres of woodland.

Father Murdock passed away October 10, 1843 and his son in writing to their relatives in New York said, "We have been bereaved of a loving father. We were hopeful of his health as he had regained his hearing, but he was taken suddenly. As for the Prophet, we have had some dealings with him and he is a man of his word. He is very honest in all his dealings and there is no doubt in my mind that he is a Prophet of God and, as such, called to guide the people of his day as Moses was of old. Mother is contented here and we will remain with the Saints as Father would have us do."

March 21, 1843 Joseph Stacy received a patriarchal blessing from the hands of Hyrum Smith who, among other things, promised him he would have a numerous posterity; a peculiar promise as he had been married a number of years and his wife, as yet, had borne him no children. He also was ordained a Seventy under the direction of Prophet Joseph Smith.

At the expulsion of the Saints from Nauvoo, he with his mother, Sally Stacy Murdock, his wife and two brothers started for the Rocky Mountains, his Father having died the previous October.



Joseph Stacy Murdock
Taken at the time of the Utah War
Courtesy: Mrs. A.T. Witt, SLC

While the body of the Church was on the banks of the Missouri River, the nation called for five hundred able-bodied men to fight their battle with Mexico, to be called the Mormon Battalion. Like a true patriot Joseph volunteered for service to his country. Being an excellent hand with cattle, he and his brother John Deans were placed in charge of the cattle of the Mormon Battalion. Joseph Stacy and his brother had to cross the Missouri River with the cattle entrusted to their care. There was ice in the river and it was bitter cold. To force them to swim was a tremendous undertaking. John Deans contracted a severe cold which developed into pneumonia from which he died and was the first pioneer to be buried on the Nebraska side of the river. Joseph continued the journey across the plains and they arrived in Salt Lake Valley September 22, 1847 when the new home of the Saints was not yet two months old. They came in the Ira Eldredge Company.

When he was coming across the plains one of his oxen died and he went to an Indian Camp to buy one that he had seen there. The Indian who owned the ox refused to sell it at any price. Joseph was, of course, disappointed but was not willing to give up. Before he went to sleep he had an idea that he decided to work out. Early next morning he put something under his coat and started toward the Indian camp. Some distance away some of the men of his party called and asked him where he was going. He replied, "I'm going to get that ox." "You'll never get it," was the rejoinder. Joseph went up to the Indian's tent and the Old Buck said, "What do you want?" "I want the ox," replied Joseph. The old Indian grunted a negative answer but when Joseph showed him a beautiful dress pattern belonging to his wife, the Indian's eyes brightened and he said, "All right give me your coat too." So Joseph returned coatless to his camp riding the ox. After obtaining the animal it was possible for him to continue his journey.

In 1849 he was called by President Brigham Young to go back to Green River and assist Saints who were on their way to Zion. In 1852 Joseph married Eliza Clark who bore him seven children, then in 1854 he married Jane Sharp and Elizabeth Hunter, and in 1858 he married Pernetta Murdock an Indian girl.

In 1856 President Young called him to take his family and assist in colonizing Carson Valley but when the news of the coming of Johnston's Army to Utah, all were recalled to Salt Lake Valley and they located at American Fork.

On November 15, 1860 Joseph was ordained a Bishop by President Young and sent to preside over the Saints who were locating in Wasatch Co. as their first Bishop. He was also their first representative in the Territorial Legislature. At this time the adjoining counties of Utah and Summit were casting covetous eyes upon newly discovered mining fields just across the Wasatch County lines. He fought the changing of county lines almost alone. Then one day in the Legislative Chamber he said, "Wasatch County takes what comfort it may in the fact that it, like the Saviour, has been crucified between two thieves." This took the listeners by storm and crystalized a new sense of fairness and justice in the lawmakers and Wasatch County lines were not changed.

In 1867 he with others, were called by President Young to colonize St. Joe on the Muddy in Nevada. They remained there three years and were then released to return to Provo Valley. While on his way home he secured a contract from the government for carrying the U.S. mail

from Provo to Echo. The Pony Express had finished its course but to Joseph's boys this was a great challenge and an opportunity for self support, and they carried the mail over this route for years with courage and skill.

The people of Heber were having a great deal of trouble with the Indians when the Murdock family returned to Wasatch County and Joseph proved to be a valuable assistance with his magnetic influence over them and persuaded them to sign a peace treaty and accept Uintah Reservation as their home and hunting ground. A marker on the Court House grounds tells the story.

Indian Peace Treaty: "Beautiful Provo Valley, named from River and once Chief Walker's hunting ground, was colonized 1859-60 by 18 families called by Brigham Young. 1864 Indian troubles forced Pioneers to build a fort at Heber. Bishop Joseph S. Murdock, friendly with the Indians, invited Chief Tabby, other chiefs and tribe to his home (2 blocks North, 1 East) August 20, 1867 when a Peace Treaty was signed and barbecue held on John Carroll's lot. This ended Indian Depredations in this valley, proving Brigham Young's statement -- "It's better to feed the Indians than fight them."

In 1899 he was arraigned before Judge Blackburn at Provo for infringement of the Edmunds-Tucker law. His first wife had died years before and he was advised to marry one of his plural wives and repudiate the others. He was a firm believer in the principle of plural marriage and obeyed the principle, feeling from the depths of his heart it was of God and no man could persuade him to repudiate any of his wives. He was sentenced to a term of one month in the territorial penitentiary for unlawful cohabitation. The aged gentleman by this time had fully convinced the judge of his honesty. Committal papers were handed him and he was allowed to go from room to room unattended by guard. He went back home to his family then went down to Salt Lake and presented his own committal papers at the penitentiary and served out his sentence of one month in the territorial penitentiary.

In the days of the Black Hawk troubles, Mr. Murdock took a leading hand in settling the Indian uprisings of those days. When Wasatch Stake was organized he was made president of the High Council which position he held at the time of his death. He always manifested implicit confidence in Mormonism, even to the hour of his death. He was the husband of five wives, the father of thirty-two children and had 137 grandchildren and six great grandchildren, a total posterity of 175, so he lived to see the words of Patriarch Hyrum Smith fulfilled to the very letter.

He was known throughout the entire church. Through times of stress this brave pioneer was a pillar of strength. He was ever ready and willing to do anything for the upbuilding of his church, his state or his country. He was respected and honored by young and old and when he died hundreds of friends came to pay tributes of respect to his memory.

He died in Heber, Utah, February 15, 1899 from the effects of la grippe followed by pneumonia. Three of his wives and seven of his children had preceded him to the great beyond. Uncle Joseph, as he was lovingly called, was a friend to every one, rich or poor, redman or whiteman.

He was generous to a fault and was always able and willing to help the hungry, the helpless, the sick and the distressed. He was truly a friend in need as many could testify.

He had faith and humility of a child and nothing pleased him better than to get some one to listen to his stories of the hand dealings of the Lord with his people.

He never tired of telling of his experiences while he was associated with the Lord and of the early pioneer life in Utah. He never missed an opportunity of bearing his testimony as to the divinity of the mission of Joseph Smith and the truthfulness of Christ's teachings.

He was a true and trustworthy soldier of the Master.

Ida M. Kirkham.